

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEHRAN 11807 281602Z

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 11807

STADIS////////////////////////////////

EYES ONLY FOR NEA/IRN NAAS FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IR, US

SUBJ: IMAGE OF IRAN IN UNITED STATES

1. YOU HAVE LETTERS FROM ME ON THIS GENERAL SUBJECT DATED
SEPTEMBER 27, OCTOBER 3, OCTOBER 13, AND OCTOBER 27.

2. DANIEL YANKELOVICH MADE A CALL ON ME LATE AFTERNOON
NOVEMBER 26 FOR THE PURPOSE OF BRIEFING ME ON HIS AUDIENCE WITH
THE SHAH THE DAY BEFORE. THIS AUDIENCE WAS TO REPORT ON THE
FINDINGS MADE AS A RESULT OF THE YANKELOVICH SURVEY OF AMERICAN
OPINION ABOUT IRAN.

3. YANKELOVICH REPORTED THAT HE HAD BEEN HIRED BY THE IMPERIAL
COURT ABOUT 8 MONTHS AGO TO MAKE THIS SURVEY. HE POINTED OUT
THAT LAST YEAR HE HAD ATTENDED THE ASPEN INSTITUTE CONFERENCE
AT PERSEPOLIS WITH OTHER AMERICAN OPINION LEADERS. HIS HIRING
HAPPENED TO COME AFTER THIS EVENT WHICH HAD SERVED TO INFORM
HIM ABOUT IRAN AND ITS PROBLEMS IN GREATER DEPTH THAN HE
OTHERWISE WOULD HAVE BEEN. THE COURT WANTED HIM TO STUDY
OPINION NOT ONLY IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC BUT AMONG INTER-
NATIONAL BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN THE
EXECUTIVE BRANCH, SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN, POLITICAL
LEADERS, LABOR LEADERS, FOREIGN POLICY OPINION MAKERS, AND
A CROSS-SECTION OF THE PRESS. THE ASPEN GROUP, REFERRED
TO ABOVE, WAS TO BE CONTACTED AS AN ELEMENT OF CONTRAST.

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4. BEFORE UNVEILING HIS FINDINGS FOR THE SHAH, YANKELOVICH POINTED OUT TO HIM AS BACKGROUND THAT THERE ARE MORE ACTORS IN US FOREIGN POLICY TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE. HE EXPLAINED THAT AUTOMATIC SUPPORT FOR A PRESIDENT'S POLICY HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. HE EXEMPLIFIED THIS STATEMENT BY EXPLAINING THAT EVEN DURING UNPOPULAR PHASES OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR, SUCH AS THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA, AT LEAST 50 PERCENT OF THE US POPULATION SUPPORTED THE PRESIDENT EVEN THOUGH ONLY 5 OR 10 PERCENT MIGHT BE ENTHUSIASTIC IN BACKING THE PARTICULAR ACTION. ACCORDING TO YANKELOVICH, THIS 50 PERCENT AUTOMATIC SUPPORT HAS NOW DWINDLED TO ABOUT 20 PERCENT.

5. YANKELOVICH'S FINDINGS SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE TO YOU. BUSINESS EXECUTIVES ARE THE MOST SYMPATHETIC GROUP IN THEIR IMPRESSION OF IRAN. THE ASPEN PARTICIPANTS AS A WHOLE WERE SOMEWHAT LESS SYMPATHETIC BUT DISTINCTLY POSITIVE ON CERTAIN POINTS. AS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE LEADERS SURVEYED, MANY UNDERSTOOD THE COMMON POLITICAL INTERESTS BETWEEN IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES, OTHERWISE THE IMAGE OF IRAN WAS VERY NEGATIVE. THIS NEGATIVISM DERIVES FROM AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS OF IRANIAN TREATMENT OF DISSIDENTS PLUS HANDLING OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE FEELING THAT IRAN HAS A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF ITS OWN SELF-INTEREST. IT GETS NO CREDIT FOR ANY LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE AREA. ADDED TO THIS IS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SHAH IS CONTINUALLY PRESSING FOR HIGHER OIL PRICES AND THAT HE IS PURCHASING MILITARY EQUIPMENT NOT FOR DEFENSE BUT FOR SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT. IN ADDITION, ONLY 27 PERCENT OF THOSE INTERVIEWED HAD HEARD OR READ ANYTHING RECENTLY ABOUT IRAN, AND WHEN THEY DID, IT CONSISTED OF REPORTS WHICH WERE NEGATIVE IN IMPACT. ACCORDING TO YANKELOVICH, THIS VACUUM OF CURRENT INFORMATION QUICKLY TRANSLATES INTO NEGATIVISM.

6. YANKELOVICH TOLD ME THAT THE SHAH WAS "VERY DISTURBED" BY THIS REPORT. HE BLAMES THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, AND PARTICULARLY THE US PRESS FOR THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS. HIS FEELINGS ABOUT THE PRESS WERE STRONGLY STATED, AND YANKELOVICH HIMSELF GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SHAH FEELS THAT "HE HAS BEEN HAD" BY CERTAIN INTERVIEWERS.

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7. YANKELOVICH AND I RAN OVER THE IMPORTANCE OF IRAN'S STRATEGIC POSITION TO THE FREE WORLD. WE ALSO DISCUSSED THE CAUSES OF IRAN'S POOR IMAGE IN THE UNITED STATES. THERE WAS SURPRISING AGREEMENT BETWEEN US ON ALL POINTS. INCIDENTALLY, HE DESCRIBED THE ATTITUDE OF MANY LIBERAL SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN ABOUT ARMS SALES AS "MORALISTIC PROVINCIALISM". IN ANSWER TO MY QUERY, YANKELOVICH SAID THAT HE DID NOT

KNOW WHETHER THE COURT WOULD CONTINUE TO REQUIRE HIS SERVICES FOR THE FUTURE SURVEYS OF THIS KIND. HE RETURNED TO NEW YORK ON NOVEMBER 27.

8. COMMENT: BELIEVE YOU SHOULD FEEL FREE TO USE ANY OF FOREGOING IN CLASSIFIED BRIEFING PAPERS FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION SINCE IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THESE FACTS OF LIFE IMPACT SERIOUSLY ON USG-GOI FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS AND COOPERATION. IF YOU REQUIRE MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, YOU CAN PROBABLY GET IT CONFIDENTIALLY BY APPROACHING YANKELOVICH IN NEW YORK.
HELMS

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